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ABSTRACT

Very little is known about the Chicanos in the northern U.S., especially those in the Northwest. Research and writing on Chicanos have concentrated on the Southwest or large urban settings, thus excluding those Chicanos residing in rural settings except for those in the migrant stream. These rural residents have become a forgotten people, overlooked even by their own leaders and authors. Yet, many of the movements which are developing in the Southwest are having an impact on the Northwestern Chicanos. This paper discusses the extent to which ties with the Southwest might have been broken by these Chicanos. Three types of generational configurations are discussed: (1) the recently settled migrants, (2) the sons and daughters of these migrants, and (3) the grandchildren. Various definitions of social problems by social scientists are discussed as they relate to the Northwestern Chicano. (NQ)

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HISTORIA VERDADERA DEL CHICANO DEL NORTE

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Historia Verdadera Del Chicano Del Norte

I am a student, but more importantly, I am a Chicano student who has experienced many facets of my diverse Chicano culture. This diversity of experience has given me an insight into the many problems that face my people. I do not claim to be an expert on Sociology or Social Problems, but I do have eyes that see and understand; it is through this experience and understanding that I have written this paper. I leave the hypotheses and other sociological jargon to those who care to interpret and analyze what I have written.

Although I have been wanting to write a book about the Chicanos in the Northwest, I have been unable to do so since there appear to be few authorities on this topic. Most of the studies that have been made are concentrated on the Chicanos in the Southwest; these works range in scope and treatment from Heller's Mexican-American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads (1966) to Rendon's Chicano Manifesto (1971).

The lack of knowledge about the Chicano del Norte (North) is clearly evident in many books that have been written about Chicanos, even those authored by Chicanos. As Rendon (1971:99) states in Chicano Manifesto:

> For our part, we Mexican Americans have been ignorant by and large of our brown brothers in the northern states (al norte). We know they were there but until recently had little idea of their numbers, their problems, their progress in completely alien surroundings, their views on Chicanismo, and their role as norteno chicanos in relation to la causa. Distance may partly explain our lack of knowledge of our noteno brother; for many decades the early immigrant settlements in the Midwest and other regions developed in virtual isolation from the Southwest. Many Mexicans went directly from Mexico to the Midwest, the Great Lakes area, or other northern states, with hardly a pause in the Southwest. To our present chagrin and fault, not until the past decade has much effort been made to draw the regions together - but that is changing rapidly. Every so often I hear that, tucked away in some state is a colonia of Chicanos I had never imagined existed, or I'll be shocked to learn that several thousand Chicanos live in cities such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Kansas City, Missouri; or Seattle, Washington. The Mexican American's presence across the continent is a basic fact about the Chicanos. For us Chicanos, the breadth of our presence and our own lack of real knowledge of its extent suggest that we face a larger

> problem in regard to communications and organization than we realized. But it is a problem that we, as a Chicano people, must resolve.

Two years later, Nava (1973:99) exhibits somewhat more knowledge and understanding of this particular segment of the Chicano population. In one section of his book, "Distribution of Mexican Americans (1910 to 1970)," he writes:

> Between 1960 and 1970 a significant number moved into other parts of the country. Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and other eastern states each have hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans while in the Northwest, Oregon and Washington now take them into account in various social, educational and political respects. As Mexican Americans spread out across the United States they have attained national prominence and consideration rather than being purely a regional minority group.
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> Most Mexican Americans leave the Southwest to work in farm work, but many stay in the communities and start a barrio. This serves as a part of entry for others that come and enter other lines of work. Middle class or professional Mexican Americans are harder to keep track of because they are not identifiable and are more socially acceptable. Although the center of social and political activity remains in Texas, Colorado and California, other unlikely states such as Kansas, Michigan and Wyoming now have surprisingly vigorous Mexican American social activity. Communication between the barrios across the nation improves steadily and the increased speed of communication tends to accelerate social changes in the nation as a whole.

Still, the fact remains that very little is known about the Chicanos in the North, especially the smaller percentage of Chicanos in the Northwest. Probably very few Chicanos in the Southwest can understand the Northwestern problems of loneliness, isolation, the feeling of total powerlessness, the knowledge or feeling that there is no place to turn, nor the fact that the decisions of others, so far removed, can effect one's life so drastically. With respect to the latter point, many of the movements which are developing in the Southwest are having an undeniable impact upon the Northwestern Chicanos, but as of yet there has been no empirical work which might assess this influence.

Israel Espinoza, president of COPCA, a Chicano student organization in Twin Falls, Idaho, echoed the cry of many Chicanos in the Northwest when he decried the absence of supposed Chicano leaders:

> Where are our leaders? Where are those who have said that they support us? I know we are but students, but we deserve to be listened to. Where are our leaders?

A cry from the Northwest, yet no one hears it; but it is becoming more apparent to the Chicanos in the Northwest that it is they who must produce their own leaders, leaders who will listen and do something about their needs.

The unheeded cry of the children of migrants, migrants who left the Southwest for various reasons to venture in the North and Northwest in search of farm work which rumors made sound so lucrative. Yet, when they arrived at their destinations, all they found were dilapidated labor camps, dirty old barns, shacks and even old cabooses in which two or more families had to live. While these were truly deplorable conditions, many of them remained or settled into the surrounding communities to begin a new life.

While I cannot speak for all Chicanos in the Northwest, I can propose a few reasons why so many migrants decided to remain, never to return to their Southwestern homes. What does the Northwest have to offer the Chicano? Why would he sever his old home ties to settle in the Northwest? Is it opportunity? I do not believe so, for the type of work that he encounters in the Northwest could be found just as easily in the Southwest - further more, the Northwestern Chicano is often confronted with even harder and more demanding kinds of work. One job, for example, is that of working for the sugar beet factories. The first position for a new employee is that of piling up the sugar beets. This job requires that a person work outside in temperatures and weather conditions which are quite foreign to most Chicanos; yet they remain to challenge even the elements - why?

While it must be acknowledged that there are many varied reasons, many claim that the Chicanos stay in the North because of economic considerations. I disagree with this assertion. A more likely explanation might be that those Chicanos who choose, and I emphasize the notion of choose, to stay in the Northwest do so because they believe that their children will have better educational opportunities. They believe that this can be done by conforming to the values and norms of the community majority population while their own numbers are so small that their identity is almost obviated. I must point out, however, that this more generally occurs in rural communities

of less than 50,000 persons which primarily serve agricultural interests.

In larger cities such as Salt Lake City, Seattle or Boise, Chicanos are more likely to be confronted by the same kinds of problems and conditions which occur in the Southwest. In other words, research and writing on Chicanos have been concentrated in the Southwest or else in the large urban settings, excluding from study those Chicanos who reside in rural settings except for those in the migrant stream.

Those who have settled out to reside in rural communities have become a forgotten people, overlooked even by their own leaders and authors. This one factor is what has prompted me to raise questions; the only approaches that I have found available are those which I have developed from my own limited experience and education.

The first thing I tried to do was to determine the extent to which those ties to the Southwest might have been broken. I did this by visiting several different towns in the Northwest and by drawing from my own experiences as a migrant in various rural settings and communities. It is my proposal that a pattern has been developed on a generational basis which might be useful for analyzing the current status of the Northwestern Chicano.

It is my impression that three types of generational configurations appear to have been rather rapidly articulated in the Northwest. I will refer to these three generations as (1) the recently settled migrants, (2) the sons and daughters of these migrants, and (3) the grandchildren.

The first group, the recently settled, are the ones who retain their original language and culture. These are the people who decide to remain in the North. These are the ones who make the sacrifices so that their children might know a better way of life. They tend to maintain the values of the Mexican-American way of life, stressing the necessity that their children learn to respect authority. In essence, they try to urge their children to conform to the dictates and practices of the dominant community, but, since there is a language barrier, their children fail to fully accomplish this type of goal.

As the second group, the sons and daughters, reach maturity and have their own children, the necessity of conformity as a means of obtaining success has become so internalized and ingrained in their character that many of them refuse to teach Spanish to their children. This often presents a paradoxical situation in that the parents may speak Spanish to each other, but not to their children. The outcome is that the child of such a family may understand the language but cannot speak it.

The third generation, the grandchildren, are often classified as anglicized Mexican-Americans. These children have not only lost the use of their Spanish language, but worse, they often possess only sterotyped images about the Chicano culture, e.g., Chicanos are thought of and discusses in terms of sombreros, siestas, burros, banditios, etc.

At this point, the third generation begins to recognize the fact that even though they are able to speak English without an accent, and even though they do not identify with nor even know much about their own Mexican heritage, they have accomplished little more in life than did their grandparents. To make matters worse, many Chicanos of this particular generation attributed their failures not to the system of education nor to the economic picture, but to themselves. Is this the case? Does their failure lie within them or might there be something missing within their educational experiences which might explain their failure?

It is a general truism that those who are interested in Social Problems and the difficulties encountered by minority group members often do not become very concerned about specific groups and their own unique problems until various conditions assume pathological proportions. Martin Luther King (1967) stated that this was the case in the early phases of black movement; he suggested that the white behavioral scientists were sadly amiss and out of step with the black cause until the blacks were forced to resort to violence. White social scientists, who are supposed to be experts on social ills, not only did little in the way of advocating change, but they apparently did not even see the need for it. This seems to have been true for blacks; it has been the case with the Indians; it has been a fact with respect to the Southwestern Chicanos; and it is now true of the Northwestern Chicanos. In other words, social

scientists may seem to have little inclination to address themselves to the problems of any given people until their problems are publicized through overt conflict.

One major reason, perhaps, may be due to the manner in which many social scientists define social problems.* One definition of social problems - relatively popular within the field - is as follows (Horton and Leslie, 1970):

> A social problem is a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable, about which it is felt something can be done through collective social action.

This definition implies that there are two kinds of people who might be affected - those who are adversely affected and those who are in a position to do something about it. Using this perspective, certain kinds of social phenomena like child labor, prohibition of alcohol, and air and water pollution were not really social problems until a large number of people became concerned about these issues. Using this approach, it can be assumed that the average child, in the early history of our nation, was not particularly enthused about the practice and conditions of child labor, but changes were not affected until certain key adult figures influenced legislation. Using this approach, it can also be assumed that Northwestern Chicanos will merely be left alone with their own unique dilemmas until they happen to be "discovered" by certain influential white social scientists.

Horton and Leslie indicate that one way to determine whether or not something may constitute a social problem is by conducting a content analysis of newspapers; if there are numerous editorials and letters to the editors and feature articles about some social entity, then it may be defined as a social problem. If this definition were to be employed by social scientists (and there is considerable reason to suspect that it is), it is only logical that those who are interested in the study of social problems would not undertake any massive investigations until the given social phenomenon had assumed crisis proportions.

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*The following pages are based on a discussion by Erickson, et. al., 1972.

Again, there is another phenomenon which operates in the complex association of color, class, culture and education; although there have been a few recent changes, it is still the case that the vast majority of social scientists are white. As such, there is little reason to believe that they are much different (even though perhaps more aware) than the remainder of the white population in terms of social and psychological segregation. To the extent that this is the case, white social scientists are quite likely to follow the white mass media. There are probably very few white social scientists, regardless of their particular area of specialization, who either subscribe to or consistently read Chicano literature. Hence, very few white social scientists are likely to be familiar with those kinds of issues which are systematically dealt with by the Chicano media. Obviously white social scientists, who employ the definition of social problems as delineated by Horton and Leslie, are quite likely to be influenced by only those "social problems" which are discussed by the white news media. Consequently, it is to be expected that behavioral scientists will not generally be effected by those problems which are routinely discussed in Chicano newspapers until the issues become quite explosive.

Dynes, et. al. (1964) have formulated another definition of social problems. A number of conditions are stipulated whereby the observer can ascertain the normative social order. Advocating that the social scientist should be objective and value free, the authors contend that only when the observer is able to obtain a fairly accurate picture of the normative order of any social system will he be able to learn to discern which kinds of human activities fall within the realm of either normative dissensus or behavioral deviation.

To the extent that racial segregation and the oppression of minority groups are integral parts of the normative order, those who advocate change will be viewed as those who constitute the source of the social problem. In other words, such persons as Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez, Reies Tijerina, Ruben Salazar and Corky Gonzales would be viewed as the social problems, and not the existing social structure. Perhaps this may account for the fact that so many white social scientists initially approached the

whole issue of race relations as if it were primarily a "black problem," an "Indian problem," or a "Chicano problem." In other words, if one were to objectively analyze any social system and then conclude that racism and oppression were inherent parts of its normative proscriptions would, in fact, be viewed as deviant or, at least, non-normative.

A third approach to social problems is that outlined by Perrucci and Pilisuk (1968). They suggest that those kinds of social conditions which negatively affect the personal value system of the social scientists may be appropriately defined as social problems. Thus, the social scientist may be able to identify and define certain social arrangements as social problems long before anyone else does. This approach has been employed--and in a very magnificent way--but the results and the impact were negligible. In this case, we are talking about the massive study entitled An American Dilemma. Decades ago, Gunnar Myrdal (1964) conducted an analysis of what appeared to be a "normative system" of racial relations in this nation and predicted that there would be blood in the streets unless there were drastic modifications in the patterns of black and white interactions. No one paid much attention, and his prophecy was amply fulfilled. Must this also be the case for the Northwestern Chicano? Will they capture the attention and imagination of the white social scientists only through violence?

There does appear to be certain kinds of limitations which are built into various intellectual approaches. These may begin with the very definitions of which kinds of social events are problematic and worthy of study; this surely limits the impact of the social scientist. Again, it must be acknowledged that there is little support for those who do undertake investigations which have little popular appeal.

As previously stated, it does appear as if the third generation of Chicanos are failing in school and, furthermore, hold themselves at fault. Gottleib (1967) has described this particular phenomenon among ghetto pupils after the black riots. In studying black and white high school dropouts, he discovered that white inner-city youth were much more likely to attribute their failure to their own individual short-comings. Blacks, however, appeared to blame

their personal failures upon the system itself - they saw their failures as being attributable to racism. Consequently, they had more hope than did the whites - if the structure could be changed (and they can see it changing) black people who subscribed to the general culturally sanctioned success goals felt that they could probably make it. Young whites, on the other hand, have no comparable thing going for them: there is nothing similar to "Black Power" nor "Black Pride" to which they can relate. For lower-class white students, their lack of committment to the more conventional means and ends may be a result of self-hatred, much as was the case for black people several years ago and much as seems to be the current case for contemporary Northwestern Chicanos.

This leads to a sense of alienation for Northwestern Chicanos - alienation from their cultural heritage, alienation from the means and goals which are more available to whites, and alienation from themselves. It is our conviction that this particular kind of situation results in self-hatred and self-denigration, one of the most sinister and diabolical psychological states of mind.

As has been the case on many campuses throughout the nation, we at Idaho State University have founded our own Chicano student group, the Mexican-American Student Organization. It has been our assumption that many Chicanos in the Northwest drop out of school because the educational system has very little which it can offer to them which might be in accord with their own personal needs and interests. We also assume that even though many young Chicano pupils cannot speak Spanish and even though they may know little or nothing about their own cultural heritage, they can never really get away from being themselves; the response of the larger white society is such that they can never be viewed as anything other than a racially and culturally distinct population. We have worked quite diligently at establishing student organizations in the public schools around Pocatello so that these Chicano pupils might learn more about their heritage. Furthermore, it has been our hope that these clubs might motivate more students to remain in school and to continue their education in college.

At present, these clubs appear to be much more successful than we had ever dared to dream. At first, when we attempted to establish these clubs, many of the students were reluctant about becoming involved. Again, some of them were quite rebellious when confronted with some of the cultural awareness approaches.* As the clubs became better organized, however, more emphasis came to be placed upon raising funds for Chicano literature to be placed in the libraries. In working with these clubs, it has been found that many young students repeatedly and insistently reject some of theoretical approaches dealing with Chicanos. Their objections were that these theories did not apply to them personally, but now they are much more likely to raise questions dealing with these matters. It is our distinct impression that these young pupils are developing a Chicano orientation and will someday become enlightened adults who will formulate their own theories about the nature and purpose of Chicanismo.

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*The issues involved in the controversies of Chicanismo are further elaborated in David Herrera and Clifford Bryan, "Chicano: A Controversial Issue," a paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Social Science Association, El Paso, Texas, April 1974.